



UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Statement for the Record on H. Res. 861
June 16, 2006

Mr. Speaker, today we mourn the death of the 2,500th American soldier in Iraq and are disgusted by the headline in yesterday's Washington Post stating, "Iraq Amnesty Plan May Cover Attacks on U.S. Military." With another American soldier killed and the news of Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki seeking amnesty for insurgents who have killed and maimed U.S. troops, this House debates H. Res. 861, a meaningless, non-binding Republican resolution that is a political document designed as a partisan campaign ploy, not a serious attempt to address the failings and mismanagement of this disastrous Iraq policy. Our troops in Iraq are in harms way, they are sacrificing tremendously for all Americans and the Iraqi people, and this Republican Congress honors their sacrifice with a farcical debate – it is shameful.

A majority of Americans know that the Bush administration's Iraq policy is strategically bankrupt and it has put U.S. troops in the untenable position of refereeing an Iraqi civil war. It is a policy that has made America less safe and more at risk in a dangerous world.

Earlier this week President Bush returned from a five hour visit to Baghdad and said, "I sense something different happening in Iraq." This profoundly unenlightened observation after five hours inside the safety of the "green zone" contrasts with U.S. troops who are on their third tour of duty in the midst of a chaotic, deadly and deteriorating civil war. This White House has made "victory" the basis for an end to the U.S. occupation of Iraq, but the only exit strategy this president has thus far developed was his own – for his departure from Baghdad after only five hours.

Outside of the safety and security of Baghdad's "green zone," there is "something different happening" and U.S. troops are surrounded by it – the depravity and brutality of an Iraqi civil war. Murderous militias, government sponsored death squads, paramilitary brigades, insurgents and organized criminals who kidnap and kill children – these are the forces that control neighborhoods, rule the streets and are on the payroll of Iraq's Ministry of the Interior.

Let me cite a May 7, 2006 article from the Los Angeles Times to underscore how different Iraq is today, "More Iraqi civilians were killed in Baghdad during the first three months of this year than in any time since the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime – at least 3,800, many of them found hogtied and shot execution-style. Others were strangled, electrocuted, stabbed, garroted or hanged. Some died in bombings. Many bore signs of torture such as bruises, drill holes, burn marks, gouged eyes or severed limbs."

This horrific depravity does not reflect a global war on terror, it is a civil war and American troops have no business separating religious groups determined to kill each other in order to settle old scores or accumulate political power. "Now the killings are systematic, personal. Masked gunman storm into houses, and the victims – the majority of them Sunnis – are never seen alive. Such killings now claim nine times more lives than car bombings, according to figures provided by a high-ranking U.S. military official, who released them only on the condition of anonymity," the same Los Angeles Times article states.

Is this the vital American interest for which 2,500 Americans have given their lives? If we don't stop these barbarous murders in Iraq does it really mean they will then bring their torture and executions to America's towns and neighborhoods as the Republican scare tactics purport? Of course not, this simple-minded "fight them over there so we don't have to fight them here" Republican rhetoric reflects their blindness to the real situation on the ground in Iraq. Iraq's endless domestic atrocities and brutality is their domestic tragedy, not a global phenomenon, but the Republicans are more interested in using this argument in their political campaigns than they are in bringing our troops home from this civil war safely.

We know that President Bush's stated premise for the war in Iraq, weapons of mass destruction, was a fabrication and a deceptive exaggeration. But is it now the duty of U.S. soldiers to police the death-squads that are operating within the Iraqi police and committing gross human rights violations? Is it the duty of our brave troops to disarm Shiite militias that are extensions of the Iraqi government and responsible for imposing religious law and hunting down violators of their sect of faith? Absolutely not.

The mantra from President Bush and the Republican Congress is "stay the course." It is an outrageous and irrational strategy that reflects the bankruptcy and myopic nature of this administration's assessment of the situation inside Iraq. An occupied Iraq will keep U.S. troops as targets of Iraq's nationalist insurgents and never allow that country to escape the current security crisis, political crisis and financial crisis. Only if this occupation ends is Iraq capable of truly being a sovereign nation that is responsible for its own problems and future.

Instead of allowing Iraq to determine its own destiny, President Bush has made an indefinite U.S. military commitment to Iraq almost assuring tens of thousands of additional U.S. soldiers will be sent to confront Iraq's problems. Since U.S. forces are in the fourth year of a war that was intended to last only months and the concept of a U.S.

victory over all the various factions of murderers, criminals and armed insurgents is delusional, one can only surmise that U.S. troops will be in Iraq when the Bush administration leaves office in January 2009. For this reason, Congress needs to dictate a clear position that will allow for the redeployment of U.S. troops within the region to defend U.S. interests and refocus our attention to the war on terrorism. This will allow for a restoration of Iraqi sovereignty and the opportunity for Iraqis to determine their own future.

The Bush administration's mismanagement of its Iraq policy from a military and geopolitical perspective is only exacerbated by the tremendous investment of U.S. tax dollars that have yielded such unremarkable results. To date, more than \$320 billion has been borrowed and spent in Iraq. Every single dollar has been added to our nation's national debt with the burden for the financial cost of this war on the backs of all of our children and the grandchildren, including those of the very soldiers who are now fighting and sacrificing in Iraq. Imagine, this Congress and White House have looked the other way as almost \$9 billion has simply disappeared into a system in which corruption is endemic and financial mismanagement the norm. Every American should feel betrayed by this Congress and its disregard for oversight and accountability with regard to the hard earned tax dollars of U.S. citizens.

As Americans fight and die in Iraq and Americans pay hundreds of billions of dollars for this war, it is remarkable to hear the words of Iraq's Prime Minister al-Maliki. President Bush earlier this week, in a moment of poetry, looked into the prime minister's eyes. It was unclear what the president saw, but we do know the words the prime minister has used on June 1, 2006 to describe U.S. troops when he said, "They (troops in the American led coalition) crush them (Iraqi civilians) with their vehicles and kill them just on suspicion. This is completely unacceptable." The Prime Minister called the U.S. violence against Iraqis a "daily phenomenon." Now, President Bush's soul-mate wants to provide amnesty for those who murdered and maimed as many as 20,000 U.S. troops. Is this why the Republicans in Congress want to stay the course in Iraq?

Mr. Speaker, there is a civil war – a 21st Century civil war – raging in Iraq. It is based on religion and historical events that can never be remedied by 130,000 U.S. troops whether they remain as an occupying force for one more year or fifty years. What we have achieved in Iraq is certain. The end of Saddam's regime, three elections, an Iraqi constitution, a new permanent government and the training of more than 250,000 Iraq security forces are the frequently stated highlights of this war. These achievements are the sole result of U.S. troops and their sacrifice and bravery. Yet, this mission is confronting a reality that is darker and much more ominous in large part because this ill-conceived pre-emptive war has unleashed forces that are beyond the control of U.S. troops that are antithetical to U.S. interests.

On May 26, 2006, Tom Lasseter reported for Knight Ridder that "Southern Iraq, long touted as a peaceful region that's likely to be among the first areas returned to Iraqi control, is now dominated by Shiite Muslim warlords and militiamen who are laying the

groundwork for an Islamic fundamentalist government, say senior British and Iraqi officials in the area.”

Even with 130,000 U.S. troops and thousands more from coalition partners, Iraq is not on a path that will yield a free, democratic state in the Middle East. The occupation has cleared the way for the establishment of a theocratic order that will ensure clerics and militiamen dictate obedience to religious law – Sharia law – with absolutely zero tolerance for any form of pluralism. The current situation in Basra only highlights the incomprehensible ignorance of the designers of U.S. Iraq policy to consider the powerful cultural and religious forces the U.S. invasion of Iraq unleashed. Tragically, the 2,500 U.S. troops who have been killed, the almost 20,000 who have been wounded and the tens of thousands of Iraqi women, children and men who have been killed – often times brutally – have suffered the consequences of President Bush’s Iraq policy.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 861 purposely avoids the dangerous reality and dismisses the tremendous challenges confronting U.S. troops in Iraq and America’s real challenges with regard to terrorism and extremist threats. This resolution is a dishonest attempt to inject raw politics into a congressional debate that will do nothing to keep America secure or bring U.S. troops home safe and soon. As we look to the future, my intention is to continue to support a comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism, keep America secure from real strategic threats and to redeploy U.S. troops from Iraq’s civil war. All Americans support our troops, but it is time for Congress to support a policy that ensures U.S. troops have an exit strategy from Iraq. This resolution should be defeated and I will vote against it.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back my time.